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A HISTORY

—OF THE—

◀FREE◊TRADE◊STRUGGLE▶

IN ENGLAND,

—BY—

GEN. M. M. TRUMBULL.



DES MOINES:  
IOWA STATE LEADER COMPANY,  
1882.

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## ❖DEDICATION❖

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To the Right Hon. John Bright, M. P., the eloquent friend and defender of the American Republic, the enlightened advocate of peace and free trade among Nations, this work is respectfully inscribed by

His disciple and friend,

M. M. Trumbull.

Dubuque, Iowa, March 16, 1882.



# History of Free Trade in England.

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## CHAPTER I.

By the Free Trade struggle in England, we mean the campaign from 1839 to 1846. Of course there were enlightened people before that time, who doubted the wisdom of the Protective system, but they were comparatively few; they were easily brushed aside by those who believed in the blessings of scarcity, and who looked upon abundance as one of the calamities of mankind. The believers in commercial freedom were told that their doctrines were very well in theory, but would never do in practice; and with this convenient argument, they had to be content. No doubt that in the very darkest ages of political economy, when "Protection" flourished in direct proportion to the popular ignorance, there were men in England who saw clear over the fogs in the valley, the humanizing influence of Free Trade, shining on the heights beyond, even as Galileo and Columbus saw farther and clearer than the men around them; who thought the physical sciences were all very well in theory, but quite unavailable in practice.

Indeed, more than a hundred years ago, Adam Smith had refuted the arguments on which the Protective theory was based, and which up to his time had been known by a sort of paradox as the "Commercial System." Carried to its logical results its effect was to cripple commerce by closing ports to international trade. In the time of Henry Clay it was known in this country as "The American System," and in our own day it is called by the captivating title of "Protection to Native Industry." Mr. Huskisson, one of the most enlightened members of Lord Liverpool's cabinet, made some advances toward Free Trade, as early as 1825, and even before that time the merchants of London had petitioned Parliament in behalf of commercial freedom. Their argument was remarkably eloquent and clear.

Nevertheless, it was not until about the year 1836 that the Free Traders made any organized effort against the insular and bigoted system of Protection which had burdened the industries of England for hundreds of years. Up to that time the liberal and scientific principles of Free Trade were regarded as political abstractions, beautifully adapted to some undiscovered Utopia, which might be expected to appear about the time of the millenium. Up to that time, the efforts of the Free



Traders were feeble and scattered over an extensive field, fortified by the Protectionists so strongly in every direction, that the reformers made but slight impression upon the works of the enemy.

In 1839 the isolated forces of Free Trade became a coherent and disciplined organization under the name of the Anti-Corn Law League. They massed themselves for a concentrated attack upon the corn laws, the key to the whole protective system. The corn laws were to Protection what the Malakoff was to Sebastopol. When that fell, the city fell. The repeal of the corn laws meant the doom of Protection, and the triumph of Free Trade. The efforts of the League were directed to the success of a specific measure, the repeal of the duties upon corn. Under the general term "corn" is comprehended flour, wheat, oats, and breadstuffs of every kind.

Just at the dawn of midsummer, 1837, the King died, and the Victorian era began. With the old King there went out an age of ignorance, vice, and political superstition. With the young Queen there came in a better, brighter, and more enlightened day. There was vice enough left, indeed, but it was no longer respectable. The Parliament died with the King, and a new Parliament was chosen. The contest was between the Whigs on the one side and the Tories on the other. The issues were like many of the issues between the Democrats and Republicans in our own country now, rather of the past, historical, than of the present, real. The offices, however, were at stake, and the Whigs won. They had a majority in the new Parliament of about thirty in the House of Commons. This, in a membership of six hundred and fifty-eight, was not so large as might be wished, but still, by keeping close in shore, and not venturing upon the wide ocean of statesmanship, they could get along with it comfortably well, and enjoy the power, the honors, and the emoluments of office.

The commercial policy of the country was not much of an issue in the election. The Tories were all Protectionists, and so were most of the Whigs. They differed only in degree, not in principle. Thirty-eight Free Traders obtained seats in the new Parliament. They ranged themselves with the Whigs, as did the Irish repealers, and the liberals of every grade. What progressive elements there were in the politics of the time, were supposed to be represented in the Whig party. The Tories, if not reactionary, were at least conservative.

The trifling difference between the "two great parties" was amusingly shown. In 1839 the ministers came within five votes of defeat on the Jamacia bill, and at once resigned. Sir Robert Peel was sent for to form a new administration. He agreed to do so, but required that certain ladies of the Queen's household should be removed from office—in



other words, should go out with the ministry. The Queen would not consent to this, whereupon Sir Robert gave up his task, and the Whigs resumed their places. These drawing room politics were now about to be rudely shaken by the new power just born in the State; the Anti-Corn Law League. A "live issue" was about to be presented to the people, something of greater consequence than the question of what ladies should form the Queen's household. The question was whether or not the food of the people should be made scarce and dear by import duties on foreign grain, levied for the "protection" of a class; whether or not the shackles which had fettered industry for centuries, should be removed, and the commerce of England made free.

The League was terribly in earnest, and its activity disquieted the "two great parties." Its agents were in every town. It circulated pamphlets literally by the million. It assumed the task of instructing a whole people in the elements of political economy. Its orators were everywhere. In every corner of the kingdom they challenged the Protectionists to public discussion, and threw them painfully on the defensive. In the manufacturing districts its meetings numbered thousands and tens of thousands. These masses of people did not have political influence in proportion to their numbers, for few of them had votes. Before the League was two years old it had become a great power outside the walls of Parliament, although inside it had no strength except in the character and ability of its advocates, and the irresistible logic of its argument.

The work before it was appalling. Monopoly was so strongly entrenched in England as to seem invincible. It was supreme in both houses of Parliament. The privileged orders and the "protected" classes were, of course, all defenders of it. The middle class—the real John Bull himself—was thoroughly imbued with the idea that British patriotism required them to support the policy which made them "independent of foreign countries." Worse than all—the masses of the people—the working classes, were Protectionists, as we shall show a little further on. They were everlastingly haunted by a ghost called "over-production;" they believed that scarcity was a good thing, because it created a demand for labor, and they dreaded lest they be brought into competition with the "pauper labor" of foreign countries.

So insignificant was the influence of the Free Traders, that, although they supported the Whig party, and the Whigs were in power, they could not obtain respectful consideration in the House of Commons. On the 18th of February, 1839, Mr. Villiers moved that certain members of the Manchester Association should be heard at the bar, in support of a Free Trade petition, but the motion was lost by more than two

to one; and we are informed by Mr. Morley that both Lord Palmerston and Lord John Russell voted with the majority.

The difficulties in the way, only stimulated the industry of the League, and within two years it had become a source of alarm to the Tories, and of perplexity to the Whigs, many of whom sympathized with it in a general sort of way, and to a limited extent. They were, however, timid and irresolute. They carried on the Government in a lazy, languid manner, and seemed anxious to be "let alone." They thought they could live forever on the reform bill triumph of 1832, but the reform bill was only a beginning, not an end. The fierce discussion of that measure had stimulated the mental faculties of the people, and a craving thirst for knowledge took possession of them.

The Penny Magazine was in active circulation, lectures were popular, mechanics' institutes were multiplying, and, in the expressive language of Lord Brougham, the schoolmaster was abroad in the land. The Whigs were afraid to risk their small majority by the introduction of any great measure of public policy, and by reason of this very timidity, their trifling majority was gradually dwindling away. They asked permission to doze in comfort on the Treasury benches, but the clamor of the League disturbed their slumbers, and the Tories were waiting and watching their own opportunity, which was close at hand.

Suddenly it occurred to the Whigs that in this new active world of politics, even governments must do something for a living. They saw the tremendous moral power already in the hands of the League, and Lord John Russell thought that if he could borrow some of that, he might spiritualize the Whig party, and save the administration. Accordingly, in the month of April, 1841, he gave notice that on the 31st of May he would move that the house resolve itself into a committee, to take into consideration the duties on the importation of foreign grain. This announcement startled the Tories, for it showed that the doctrines of the League had permeated the administration itself. They closed their ranks and assumed the offensive. Lord Sandon asked Lord John Russell what the Government intended to do with the Corn Laws. He answered that they proposed to abolish the "sliding scale," and impose a moderate fixed duty of eight shillings a quarter (a shilling a bushel) upon wheat, and a proportionate duty upon other grain. The "sliding scale" was a political contrivance by which the duties upon foreign grain were fixed according to the prices of it in the domestic market. When the price of wheat in Mark lane was high, the duties on imported wheat were low, and vice versa, the intention being to keep the price of grain always at such a height as to furnish the British farmer a fair degree of "protection" against the "pauper labor" and untaxed lands of foreign countries.

In this moderate proposition of Lord John Russell the Tories saw a menace against the monopolies which they had enjoyed for centuries. With the bravery of desperation they determined to come out of their intrenchments and attack. They would not wait until the 31st of May, but determined to precipitate the issue then and there.

The discussion on the annual budget just then presented by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, resolved itself into a debate on the corn and sugar duties. The debate lasted many nights, and when it ended the Tories had the best of it. On the motion that "the Speaker do now leave the chair," the Government was beaten by the decisive majority of 317 to to 281. The cheers of the Protectionists rang out peal after peal like the laughter of a chime of bells; they reverberated through the great hall of William Rufus; they burst into Palace yard, and chased each other among the gothic arches of the old abbey across the way, where Pitt and Fox lay sleeping side by side.

To the amazement of the country the ministers did not resign, but on the next evening Lord John Russell coolly announced that he would take up the discussion on the proposed alteration of the corn laws on the 4th of June; but before that day sentence of dismissal was pronounced by the House of Commons against him and his government. Sir Robert Peel determined not to allow the ministers any time to recover from their great defeat. He therefore introduced his famous resolution that Her Majesty's Ministers do not possess the confidence of this house. After four nights' debate, his resolution was carried by a majority of one vote; the numbers were 312 to 311. From this blow the Whig party never recovered; it was stunned and bewildered by it; the ministers could not believe it real; it appeared impossible to them that within ten years of the passage of the reform bill, the Tories could once more be in the ascendancy. They therefore refused to resign, but dissolved the Parliament. They appealed from the verdict of the House of Commons to the tribunal of the people at the polls, and there also the judgment was against them.

## CHAPTER II.

In the midst of scarcity and business depression the election of 1841 was held. Though but few Free Traders were elected, the inspiration of the whole contest came from the Anti-Corn Law League. By the moral strength of its ideas it seemed to crowd all other issues out of the way, and forced a discussion of the Free Trade question at nearly every polling place in the kingdom, where there was any contest at all. The election resulted in an overwhelming majority for the Tories. They had a majority in the House of Commons of nearly a hundred over all opposing elements combined, and on a square issue with the Free

Traders they could command a majority of more than three hundred and fifty votes. The Protectionist victory was complete, yet this was the Parliament that was destined, within five years, to overthrow the Protective system, and establish Free Trade in England as firmly as the British Islands are anchored in the sea. When Parliament met in August, the Whigs resigned, and Sir Robert Peel came into power, with an obedient and well disciplined majority behind him, sufficient to carry every measure proposed by Ministers. In the House of Lords his majority was even greater than in the House of Commons.

In the new Parliament was a new man, a calico printer from the North, a moral and mental force so great that ere long he was regarded by all Englishmen as the most important personage that had been seen in the House of Commons since Oliver Cromwell had a seat there. His name was Richard Cobden. This man had already become the electric principle of the Anti-Corn Law League, the very genius of the commercial revolution. He was a leader without selfishness or personal ambition, a leader whom all men loved to follow. He was a statesman by instinct, an organizer with the genius of Napoleon. He was an orator of such convincing powers that he converted more men to his views by simply talking to them than any other man of his time, or perhaps of any time, not only tens of thousands of Manchester operatives, but even farmers, who had been persuaded that Free Trade would ruin them. Without any advantages of personal grace, or any of the arts of rhetoric, there was an earnest truthfulness about him that made a great impression. He had a boundless store of knowledge, and no matter how extravagant his assertions appeared to be, he always had the facts at hand to verify them. He grouped his facts together with great skill, and moulded them into irresistible arguments. He fastened responsibility upon his adversaries with terrible emphasis. In playful fancy, and in the power of enforcing his points by homely illustrations drawn from every-day life, he resembled Abraham Lincoln—or rather we should say that Lincoln resembled him. He resembled him in the abundance of his humor and the quaint sharpness of his satire. Above all things, there was a candor and a sincerity about him that went far towards persuading men that he was right. A deep love of humanity pervaded all he wrote and all he said. His life was pure, his character without reproach. With the factory dust upon him, he faced the patrician monopolists on the Tory benches, with a courage as high as that of the purest Norman of them all. He was as effective inside the House of Commons as out of it, and it is certain that he converted Sir Robert Peel, the leader of the Protectionist party, to a belief not only in the expediency of Free Trade, but in the wisdom and the justice of it. In fact it boded ill to

the Tories when they saw that their great chieftain permitted his face to show how he was hurt by the shafts of Cobden, and it boded further mischief to them when they noticed how he sat spell bound, listening to every word that fell from his enemy. We know now, that Peel at last came completely under the fascination of Cobden's intellect, and permitted that intellect to dominate his own.

We have shown in the first chapter, that in 1841 Whigs and Tories were alike protectionists, differing only in degree. If further proof is needed, let it be remembered that a short time previously it was said by Lord Melbourne, the Whig Prime Minister, that the repeal of the Corn Laws was the most insane project that ever entered man's head, and the Tory Chieftain, Peel, during the debate on the want of confidence resolution in June, said: "Who in this House has more steadily stood forward in defense of the existing Corn Laws than I have done?" And to the electors of Tamworth, during the canvass of 1841, he said "that he had come to the conclusion that the existing system should not be altered, and that our aim ought to be to render ourselves independent of foreign supply," the ready jargon which protectionists have used in all countries, and in every age.

In spite of all attempts to draw him out during the first session of the New Parliament, Sir Robert Peel refused to disclose the future policy of his government. October came and still his plans were wrapped in mystery. Subsequent events convince us that he did not know them himself. Parliament adjourned until February, and he took till then to consider what was best to do. The short session of 1841 was not remarkable for anything except that Cobden spoke then for the first time in Parliament. He exposed the sufferings of the people to the gaze of the Senate, and charged against the Protective system the prostration of English industry. He gave notice to both Whigs and Tories, that the question of the Corn Laws must be met, and that a fearful responsibility should be laid on those who taxed the food of the people. There were those who sneered at this unpleasant person, but it is certain that the country gentlemen would have spent a more agreeable Christmas if he had not spoken at all.

During the recess the League was hard at work. The Free Trade agitation was extended to Ireland and Scotland. Newspapers were started and vast numbers of pamphlets were distributed in every direction. Heaps of information concerning every trade and occupation in the kingdom were piled up for use in the next Parliament. Meanwhile there was great anxiety throughout the country as to the intentions of the Government. Cabinet meetings were held, but not a word leaked out as to their proceedings. The two or three speeches made by Cob-



den at the short session had sunk deep into the mind of Peel. The proof of it is clear. During the canvass, in the summer, he had declared that "the existing system should not be altered;" in the winter, he had changed his mind. Why? In that interval he had heard Cobden.

A trifling incident which occurred just before the opening of Parliament alarmed the monopolists, and convinced the country that the League was actually making discord in the Tory Cabinet itself. The incident was this: The Toryist Tory in all England was the Duke of Buckingham, and he was in the Cabinet. With the blood of Henry Plantagenet in his veins, and the lordship of thousands of broad acres in his possession, he was a stately specimen of that haughty Norman aristocracy which for nearly eight hundred years had held the Saxon in a state of serfdom, and had kept his lands by right of conquest. So long as he was in the Cabinet, it was certain that modern civilization would be excluded from its councils; that no such vulgar theme as "economics" would be debated at its meetings. So long as he was in the Cabinet monopoly might sleep in peace; the feudal system would stand firm, grim and defiant, as the Tower of London itself. One morning it was whispered at the Carlton Club that the Duke of Buckingham had resigned, and the whisper was correct. Then the country knew that some changes in the Corn Laws had been determined on. Inspired by the news, the League worked harder than before.

The year 1842 opened gloomily. There was great distress throughout the country, and there was a deficit in the revenue of more than twelve millions of dollars. When Parliament met in February, there was very great anxiety to know what the Government meant to do. To the consternation of the monopolists, Sir Robert Peel announced that it was his intention to meet the deficit by the imposition of an income tax; that, although he should maintain the "sliding scale," the duties on corn and provisions would be reduced. He also said that it was the intention of the Government to revise the tariff, so as to deprive it of its prohibitory features, and to lower the duties on about seven hundred and fifty articles. This, from a Protectionist Tory Ministry, was a great advance, and showed that small as was the number of Free Traders in the House of Commons, the ideas of the League had actually affected the policy of the Government.

The natural result of compromise followed. The Government was bitterly assailed by both sides; by the Protectionists, for having yielded anything to the League, and by the Free Traders for not yielding more.

Cobden was unsparing and fierce in his denunciations; immense meetings were held in the North, and in all the manufacturing country, at which resolutions were passed savagely condemning the ministry. At



some of these meetings Sir Robert Peel was burned in effigy, a barbarous insult, which deeply wounded him, and of which he rightfully complained. Cobden, and the other leaders of the League were not responsible for these excesses, any further than all popular leaders are responsible for the mad acts of their followers, who rush past them and out of their control.

The debate of 1842 is a great event in the political history of England. Sir Robert Peel introduced his plans with a very ingenious and comprehensive speech; a speech which showed that he was complete master of the subject, and familiar with all the details of England's commercial and industrial condition. He didn't believe that the Corn Laws were responsible for the distress which he admitted did exist. He found reasons for it in all the corners of the earth from China to America. He was weak enough to attribute some of it to the displacement of hand labor by steam power, to over-investment of borrowed capital, and to alarms of war; to anything in fact but the Corn Laws. Still, he proposed some amendment to these laws. He thought that the "sliding scale" could be so amended that the price of wheat would not vary much from somewhere between fifty-four and fifty-eight shillings a quarter (about a dollar and seventy-five cents a bushel.) He contended that the country should rely upon home production for its food supply, and should be willing to pay an extra price for it, because of the advantage of being "independent of foreign countries."

According to the etiquette of Parliament, the duty of answering the Prime Minister fell upon the leader of the opposition, and Lord John Russell rose to perform that duty. He had very little to say. A Protectionist himself, he didn't know how much of the ministerial plan he might dare to criticise, and no doubt he felt himself that night to be entirely overmatched by Peel. He therefore stammered out a few sentences just to show that he was in opposition, and sat down. But there was a man there who was not afraid even of the accomplished minister; that man was Cobden. He denounced the plan of the Government as quite insufficient and unsatisfactory, because it did not reach down and remove the real causes of the people's poverty. This kind of argument, though severe, could be endured, but when the orator, out of his abundant knowledge, showed that the Prime Minister was in error as to his facts, and in that way toppled over the stately framework of his reasoning, the House of Commons recognized at once, that the smoky country had sent a man to Parliament who was so thoroughly informed as to the agricultural, the manufacturing, and the commercial condition of England, that not even Peel, the greatest debater there, could safely make a statement on insufficient evidence, or even venture an opinion on any

doubtful testimony. Here was a man whose facts fell upon the minds of his hearers with the force of the blows delivered by the steam hammer in his factory. The oratory of the colleges retreated from a contest with the untutored eloquence of this new member, who actually earned his own living. Sir Robert Peel, grand, impassive, cold, lost his ancient self-command under the oratory of Cobden, and allowed his countenance to betray the emotions that stirred the very depths of his conscience and his intellect.

With the exception of his affected superstitious dread of "steam power," which was unworthy of him, it was noticed that Peel, in his great speech, had been careful not to insult the intelligence of his hearers by asserting the false and flippant maxims which formed then as now the stock in trade of the Protectionist party. He scorned to use the customary cant that high prices of the necessities of life made wages higher, and therefore were a benefit to the working man. He knew that his speech was going down to posterity, and he preferred that it should not be disfigured by such fallacies. As the *Edinburgh Review* said at the time, he left the utterance of these absurdities to his subordinates. With what inward scorn he must have heard Sir Edward Knatchbull, a member of his own Cabinet, declare, amidst uproarious ridicule, that "the duty on corn should be calculated in such a manner as to return to the landed interest full security for their property, and for the station in the country which they had hitherto held." No matter how biting the hunger of the industrious poor might be, the price of bread must be kept so high that the idle, fox hunting, horse racing aristocracy might still riot in profligate extravagance.

The progress of this instructive debate proved how true it is that "fools rush in where angels fear to tread." "Peart and chipper" young statesmen on the Tory side hurled right in the face of Cobden, Protectionist maxims that Peel would have been afraid to utter. One of the Prime Minister's young statesmen was the Marquis of Granby, a coming Duke, who knew as much about political economy as the wooden effigy of his ancestor, the historic "Markis O'Granby" which swung from the sign post of the hospitable tavern at Dorking, once kept by Mr. Tony Weller. The Marquis told the House of Commons that "the experience of all Europe shows that the certain consequence of making food cheap is to lower wages." Sir Francis Burdett, who for forty years had been a radical reformer and a revolutionist, who had once been committed to the Tower by the House of Commons, and who had joined the Tories in his old age, declared that "to the laboring classes the price of corn did not signify one straw." Lord Mahon and Mr. Stuart Wortley talked in the same strain, and even Mr. Gladstone

fluently prattled about "the fallacy of cheap bread." No wonder that Mr. Cobden taunted the Tory members about their ignorance, declaring that no such ignorance could be found among any equal number of working men in the North of England. Notwithstanding all this, the winding up of the debate showed a very comfortable majority for the Tories of one hundred and twenty-three.

### CHAPTER III.

In the month of May there was a long debate on the new tariff. This debate is a curiosity now. With that speculative wonder which moves us as we roam through the great national museums of Europe, and gaze on the mummies of old Egypt, so we wander through the mazes of this debate, and look upon the mummified theories of "Protection." It is hard to realize that only one generation ago English statesmen actually believed that by making everything scarce and dear the general prosperity was increased. It would be even laughable if this mischievous delusion had not emigrated to America and taken possession of our statesmen here to the serious injury of the productive classes. The old superstition, now obsolete in England, still flourishes in the United States.

Sir Robert Peel introduced his new tariff with many apologies to the Protectionists, and assurances that it wouldn't hurt them very much. Like a mother giving physic to her children, he told them that it was good for them, and that if the taste was slightly unpleasant they would be all the better for it in the end. When the portly gentlemen of the "landed interest" complained that fat cattle and lean were to be admitted at the same figures, instead of being taxed according to their weight, the bland Sir Robert told them that it was all the better for them, because said he, the English graziers can import lean cattle at a low rate of duty, and fatten them for market, and as to fat cattle they wouldn't be imported anyhow. They couldn't stand a sea voyage. "No fat ox," he said, "could stand a trip across the Bay of Biscay," and as for France, why none would come from there, because that country was herself importing cattle. He showed that none would come from Belgium, Holland, Germany or the Prussian League, and then with grim flattery he told them that the English beef was so much better than any other kind that it would always bring a higher price in the market. With one side of his mouth he was telling the hungry people that he was about to cheapen beef by letting foreign cattle in, and with the other he was quieting the protectionists with a lot of blarney, and the assurance that, although he was about to open the gates, the lean cattle wouldn't come in and the fat cattle couldn't.

When Sir Robert sat down Mr. Hume congratulated the ministers on their conversion to the principles of Free Trade. This pleasantry was resented by Mr. Gladstone, who declared that no conversion had taken place, and that their opinions remained unchanged. As a discrimination was made in the new tariff in favor of the British colonies, a great deal of alarm was manifested, lest the Americans should smuggle their bacon and other produce into England, by the way of Canada, and thus obtain the benefit of the colonial tariff; but this was quieted by Mr. Gladstone, who didn't think that the Americans would do any such thing. Certainly not.

Even potatoes had been shut out of the country by high protective duties. The new tariff admitted them on payment of two pence per hundred weight from foreign countries, and one penny per hundred weight from British colonies. It was contended that twelve pence per hundred weight was little enough "protection" for the English potato grower, and that it was the highest patriotism to keep old England independent of foreign potatoes.

Every monopoly protested against the new tariff. The miners of Cornwall protested against a reduction of the duties on metal ores, and the members from that county gave warning that if the deep mines of Cornwall were once abandoned, they would never be worked again. Some other people protested against a reduction of the duty on iron, because it was necessary that British iron should be protected against the pauper iron of Germany. Some persons owned a stone quarry on the isle of Portland. They protested against a reduction of the tariff on building stone, and declared that such reduction would be the ruin of their "industry." Even the wretched Irish peasant claimed protection for his pig, and Mr. Smith O'Brien actually moved to increase the duty on swine from five shillings a head all round to four shillings a hundred weight. Every "interest" predicted ruin to the country if its particular monopoly should be disturbed.

When the bill went up to the Lords it had of course to run the gauntlet of the same opposition it had met in the House of Commons. Lord Stanhope used an argument which sounds very familiar to us here in America. The reduction of duties, he said, would cause great distress among the industrious classes, with whom the "foreigner" was put unfairly in competition; and the Duke of Richmond opposed it because it brought the English producer into competition with the "pauper labor" of foreign countries. Nevertheless the bill was allowed to pass.

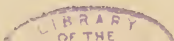
The House of Lords being composed almost exclusively of great land-owners and monopolists, it is not surprising that the principles of Free Trade were looked upon in that House as very low and vulgar, as revo

lutionary in fact, and destructive of that hoary, feudal system on which the aristocracy of England rested. The noble peers regarded pheasants and peasants as alike made for their exclusive use and pleasure, and being a very ignorant set of people, they were easily thrown into panic whenever they thought their monopolies were threatened. They regarded the Anti-Corn Law League as a monster more revolutionary and dreadful than even the steam engine, or the electric telegraph, or an untaxed newspaper. On the 19th of April, 1842, Lord Brougham moved in the House of Peers, that no tax should be levied upon corn, either for protection or for revenue. We are not surprised that this motion was lost by 89 to 6. The wonder is where the 6 came from.

In August Parliament adjourned, and people had time to foot up the accounts of the session, and strike a balance of party gains and losses. There was a difference of opinion as to the amount of profit and loss, but all agreed that whatever gains had been made must be placed to the credit of the Free Traders, and that the losses were all on the side of the Protectionists. The material gain to the Free Traders made by the reduction of duties in the new tariff was trifling in comparison to the moral victory they had won in compelling the Ministry to concede the principle of Free Trade. It was noticed that in all the debate the Ministers had been careful not to defend Protection on its merits. They apologized for it and pleaded for it. They argued that great interests had grown up around it, that society had shaped itself to it, and that it could not be suddenly and violently overthrown without carrying in its fall the ruin of the protected classes, but they did not defend it as a correct principle of political economy.

Armed with this concession the League renewed its assault upon monopoly, and during the recess it was busily educating the people and creating a public opinion that should be more potent in the next session than it had ever been before. Great public meetings were held in all parts of the country, and Free Trade resolutions were adopted at all of them. On the 22d of November there was a tremendous meeting of the League at Manchester, which resolved to raise \$250,000 for the work, and \$20,000 of it was put into the hat there and then. This was considered a great collection for one meeting, and yet before the work was ended \$300,000 was contributed to the League fund at one meeting in that very same town.

It was about this time that John Bright began to be recognized as a power in the State. Although not yet in Parliament, his influence outside of it was almost as great as Cobden's inside. A massive Englishman was John Bright, a handsome man, strong of body and brain, one of the few great orators of modern England; his eloquence was copious,





pure, sparkling, strong; his invective burned like fire. He was more fluent and stately than Cobden, though no man could be more convincing. His voice was melodious, his magnetism great, and thousands of men crowded and jostled one another to get near him. They saw in him one of the great apostles of peace, a man whose politics were governed and controlled by the most sublime religion. Second to Cobden, and to Cobden alone, was John Bright, in the great work of lifting the incubus of the protective tariff from the industries of Great Britain. He rendered great service between the close of the session of 1841 and the opening of the session of 1843.

When Parliament met in 1843, Lord Howick moved that the House go into Committee to consider the distress of the country, and thereupon arose one of the most instructive debates that ever took place in Parliament. Lord Howick contended that the protective tariff had crippled the agricultural, the manufacturing, and the shipping interests of the country, and argued that the Corn Laws ought to be repealed. We can hardly conceive that the present Prime Minister of England, the great leader of the Liberal party, was, that night, the Tory champion, whose duty it became to answer Lord Howick. Mr. Gladstone admitted the distress of the country, and even conceded much of the argument of his adversary, but resisted the motion on the ground of expediency; it wasn't the time to repeal the Corn Laws; the measures of last session had not had a fair trial; they ought to see what other countries would do to reciprocate a reduction of duties; England could not be expected to open her ports, while she had hostile foreign tariffs to contend against, and so on. Never once did he contend that the Protective system was sound, either in morals or as a system of social science. His speech was an excuse for protection, not a defense of it.

The Protectionist principle that the end of all true political economy is to promote scarcity, found outspoken champions in this debate. Mr. Ferrand, a Protectionist from Yorkshire, contended that the distress of the country was all owing to machinery, that if machinery could be done away with, the conveniences of life would become scarcer, and this would create a demand for labor, the people would all get employment at good wages, and prosperity would be the result. He was not alone in this opinion, for Mr. Liddell thought that Lord Howick's plan of opening up new markets would do no good, because no matter how many new markets were opened up, such was the tremendous power of machinery in England, that they would soon be overstocked, as well as the old. Mr. Ward apologized for machinery on the curious ground that it was necessary, in order for the English to compete with the cheaper labor and more fertile soil of other countries. He thought that



the Americans had made a mistake in their high protective tariff of 1842, but contended that the English had provoked it by fixing such a high duty on American corn. The most bewildering doctrine that this remarkable debate produced came from Mr. Muntz, member from the important town of Birmingham, who contended that the present condition of things was unnatural, and that "we must either repeal the Corn Laws, or *lower the price of silver*." It is comforting to know that the silver lunacy is not a new disease, peculiar to the United States. No wonder that the common people should have such crude notions on the science of political economy, when the statesmen of the country could talk as they did in this debate.

Mr. Cobden replied to the Protectionists in a very vigorous, and what proved to be a very unfortunate speech. In the course of it he declared that he held the Prime Minister individually responsible for the "distress of the country," and he repeated this expression with strong emphasis. Sir Robert Peel rose in a state of nervous excitement and resented this personal attack. His private secretary, Mr. Drummond, had been assassinated a few days before, in mistake for him, and the tragedy shocked him greatly. He accused Mr. Cobden of pointing him out for assassination, and the sympathy of the House was with Peel. In vain Mr. Cobden tried to explain that a wrong interpretation had been put upon his words. The House refused to hear him.

This incident was a most unhappy one, for it placed those great men in the position of personal enemies for two years, a position which caused Mr. Cobden to be unjust to Peel, on more than one occasion. In striking contrast, it must be said that the treatment of Cobden by Sir Robert Peel was all the time in the highest degree magnanimous. The suspicion of a motive so abhorrent to his gentle nature wounded Cobden so keenly that it seemed almost impossible to forgive the man who, even in the excitement of a great debate, could impute it to him. It was the opinion of many that although the Free Traders had the best of the argument, this advantage was thrown away by Cobden's indiscreet attack upon the Prime Minister. It isn't likely that it affected any votes either one way or the other. The division showed a majority for the Minister of one hundred and fifteen.

#### CHAPTER IV.

In May 1843, Mr. Villiers brought forth his annual motion for a total repeal of the Corn Laws. This debate was, if possible, more remarkable in its display of statesmanlike ignorance than the other, but unlike the other, the ignorance was not all on the side of the Protectionists. Even Mr. Villiers himself showed a remarkable forgetfulness of his

geography when he said "the use of wheaten bread is denied to ten millions of people, while a plague had arisen in Louisiana, because the produce was left to rot upon the ground for want of a market." He evidently had a very confused idea of where Louisiana was, or what was the nature of her products. That wheat rotting on the ground should produce a plague, was a phenomenon outside all the laws of physiology and peculiar to the State of Louisiana.

Once more it became the duty of Mr. Gladstone to answer the Free Traders, and he contented himself with leaving them unanswered. He did not deny either their facts or their conclusions. He admitted the distress of the people, but contended that they were better off than they were two hundred years ago, which was an unsubstantial sort of comfort, but hardly satisfactory. He made the very important announcement that the government would not consent to any further modifications of the protective system. The measures of last year had not yet had a fair trial.

In this debate the wisdom of biting off your nose to spite your face was maintained by some ignorant statesmen who knew no better, and by some intelligent statesmen like Mr. Gladstone, who did know better. It was contended that if foreign countries would not open their ports to British manufactures, England should close her ports against their wheat and bacon. That the English people were suffering for want of food made no difference. They should maintain "reciprocity," even at the price of starvation.

The "reciprocity" theory did good service to the ministers in this debate. Whether or not they believed in it themselves is doubtful, perhaps some of them did. It was quite evident that a large majority of the members of the House of Commons had not yet learned that it is a good thing to buy in the cheapest market, even if you cannot sell in the dearest, and so they kept ringing the changes on "reciprocity." Mr. Christopher maintained that to adopt Free Trade without any guarantee of "reciprocity" from foreign countries, would be useless to the manufacturers, and ruinous to the agriculturists.

One ardent member, Mr. Thornley, had become so zealously interested in the "reciprocity" plan, that he just stepped over to America to have a talk with the President of the United States about it. It is a mortifying fact that the President filled him full of lies, and false promises, and then sent him home again. Mr. Thornley told the House that if the English would adopt Free Trade, the Americans would immediately do the same; that Mr. Tyler told him so. Mr. Tyler also told him that the only obstacle to an extended trade between the two countries was the English Corn Law. All that was necessary to establish "reciprocity" was for the English to begin.

Mr. Cobden showed that the only way to raise the price of corn was by making it scarce, and that this was the object of the present law. He declared that no party had the right to make the food of the people scarce. To ordinary minds these propositions appear to be self-evident, and yet there was a great party in England that denied them, and maintained that the food of the people ought to be made dear in order to protect the farmer against the cheaper labor, the richer soil, and the finer climate of other lands. Unhappily, this party controlled the House of Commons, as the division showed, for the Free Traders were beaten by the frightful majority of 381 to 125.

In the month of June the subject came up again in a discussion as to the relative merits of Tweedledum and Tweedledee. Lord John Russell moved to go into Committee to take into consideration the laws relating to the importation of foreign grain. As he was at that time a Protectionist himself, and differed with Peel only in preferring a fixed duty to the "sliding scale," his motion had no practical value whatever, except to keep debate alive. It gave an opportunity for a repetition of the old arguments against the Corn Laws, and Mr. Gladstone answered them again as before. The debate served the useful purpose of drawing from the Government the positive avowal that no change in the Corn Laws would be permitted. Mr. Gladstone declared that the measures of last year were a virtual contract between the government and the agricultural interest, and that it would be dishonorable to disturb it. This loving debate between the Whigs and the Tories, as to whether a fixed duty or a sliding scale was most effective in protecting the aristocracy, was rudely broken into by blunt old Hume, who declared that all "protection" was spoliation and injustice, and ought to be abolished. Although Sir Robert Peel and Mr. Gladstone both declared, in the course of this debate, that the law of the last session should be maintained, there was a fidgety unrest among the monopolists, for fear that the Ministers would be again driven from their policy by the Anti-Corn Law League.

Thus far we have chiefly spoken of the Free Trade struggle as it was fought in Parliament, up to the summer of 1843. Outside, the contest was sharper still, and far more vigorous. The work of the reformers was harder too. A whole people had to be aroused, instructed, convinced. An irresistible public opinion must be created, without which all efforts in Parliament would be in vain. The upper classes of the English people were Protectionists from interest, the lower classes from prejudice. The middle classes, though largely Protectionists, were divided, but amongst them lay the strength of the Free-Traders.

It is not surprising that the English lower classes were Protectionists.

All their prejudices lay in that direction. The Englishman was exclusive, partly by nature, and partly because of geographical conditions. His island being cut off by the sea from the continent of Europe, he became a sea-girt sort of personage himself. He was arrogant and conceited. He displayed a boorish, uncouth contempt towards all foreigners, never allowing that any change of latitude or longitude could make a foreigner of him. Even in Paris he complacently regarded all the Frenchmen he met upon the Boulevards as "Foreigners." He was always bidding "defiance to the world." He christened his war ships "Bulldog," "Vixen," "Spitfire," "Destruction," "Devastation," "Terrible," "Vengeance," "Conqueror," and similar pet names. His great chest would pant like a blacksmith's bellows as he roared in the ears of all mankind his unpolite refrain, "Britannia rules the waves." He thought that the people of other nations had but little to eat; that the Frenchman lived on frogs, the Italian on maccarroni, and the German on an inferior quality of cabbage. He was a natural Protectionist.

The lower classes of the English people were very much like the lower classes of some other people, insanely jealous of those whom they regarded as lower yet than themselves. In America it may be the negro or the Chinaman; In England it was the frog-eating Frenchman, or the frugal Dutchman who was too mean to squander all his wages, or the barbarian Russian who lived on tallow, and whose clothes cost him nothing, the skin of an ox furnishing a complete outfit for a year. Any demagogue could rouse the enthusiasm of these people by denouncing Free Traders, as an unpatriotic set who were seeking to subject the noble British workman to a ruinous competition with the "pauper workman" of the continent. It was part of the stock business of Tory statesmen at every hustings in the kingdom to glorify the wisdom of that policy which was to make England "independent of foreigners," especially for meat and flour. Even enlightened statesmen like Peel and Gladstone did not disdain to use this narrow argument in the House of Commons itself.

In addition to their insular prejudices, the English working classes believed in the blessings of scarcity, and the miseries of abundance. They lived in fear of an impossible Dragon called "Over-Production." They regarded machinery as their chief enemy, because it saved labor, and filled shops and ware-houses with goods. It was the grumpy coal-fed monster, breathing smoke and flame, whose offspring was "over-production." They opposed railroads because of their labor-saving tendency, and many of them could tell the exact number of men "thrown out of work" between London and Bristol by the Great Western Railway alone. There were so many stage coachmen and guards, so many

wagoners whose busy teams moved the merchandise of the country, so many inns where the stages stopped for dinner or supper or to change horses, involving the employment of so many ostlers, cooks, waiters and other people. Then look at the blacksmiths, whose business it was to shoe the stage horses and the wagon horses; look at the harness-makers, whose business it was to make the harness for them. Think of the ruin of the innkeepers themselves, to say nothing of the loss to the farmers and stock raisers, who would no longer have a market for coach horses or wagon horses, or for the oats to feed them. It was in vain to point out the army of workmen that the railroads would throw "into work," the comforts and conveniences they would multiply to all the people; these advantages were too abstract and remote. The injuries were direct, near and palpable.

In the political philosophy of these people, all destruction of property was a blessing, because to replace the property gave employment to working men. The burning down of a block of buildings was a God-send, because the houses had to be rebuilt, thereby giving employment to bricklayers and carpenters. In 1846 a remarkable hailstorm visited London. Every exposed pane of glass was broken by the hailstones. This was regarded as a merciful dispensation of Providence, because it made a scarcity of glass in London. It was merely a sum in simple addition to show the value of the storm. It was very evident that the glass makers and glaziers would make a good thing out of it, and the money they earned would be spent for the necessities and comforts of life; the tailor and the shoemaker would get some of it, and the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker. It was useless to explain that this money was drawn from other employments of industry, and that to the full value of the glass destroyed it was a total loss to the community. This, too, was abstract; it was like complex fractions to scholars who were not yet out of long division.

All public improvements that lessened wear and tear, were bitterly opposed by those primitive political economists. The wooden pavement was a dangerous innovation, because if it should be generally used in a great city like London it was easy to see that the wear and tear of horse shoes and wagon wheels would be greatly lessened, and blacksmiths would be thrown "out of work." A street sweeping machine invented about this time had to be protected by the police, as a mob of scavengers were determined to prevent its use. It was claimed that the machine could do the work of twenty men. The scavengers, of course, made their living by dirt; the more dirt, the more work for them. Here was a machine that caused an "over-production" of cleanliness, and, true to their protectionist ideas, they proceeded to destroy it.



There is nothing surprising in all this; an ignorant people only reason from first appearances, to the immediate and visible result. To the unthinking working men of England, the first effect of a labor-saving machine was to throw somebody "out of work," the first effect of the hailstorm was to throw somebody "into work" therefore they looked upon the machine as an enemy, the storm as a friend. In like manner, the first effect of a cargo of merchandise imported from a foreign country was to make abundance, and to lessen the demand for labor in that class of goods, therefore they were in favor of promoting scarcity by a high protective tariff, that should compel those goods to stay across the sea.

It was not to be expected that they would voluntarily explore the depths of political science, and thus obtain a knowledge of the true principles of social and political economy, any more than to expect them to saw wood for pleasure. Their minds soon became tired when not aided by visible object lessons, and the men who could appeal to their mutual experiences, had a great advantage over the abstract reasoner, no matter how well built his logical structure was. Often, in the coffee houses, the club rooms, and other places where working men used to meet and discuss the problems of the English political and social system, the Protectionist champion, confused and overwhelmed by the reasoning of his Free Trade antagonist, would extricate himself by an ingenious recourse to the "over-production" hob-goblin. "What caused the distress," he would shout, "in the hard winter of '35?" "Over-production." "What shut down the Birmingham forges in '36?" "Over-production." "What sent the shoemaker of Northampton on the tramp in '38?" "Over-production," and so on to the end of the chapter. It was certain that among the audience were some of the fancied victims of over-production, and all the rest were sympathizers. It was no use to explain to them that what they called "over-production" was nothing but the blessing of plenty, which, if not hindered by protective legislation, would soon diffuse itself throughout all the land, sharing its benefits among all the people, acting and re-acting upon every member of the community. To comprehend this required a mental effort, and that was labor. They were not ready to think just then, and the discomfited Free Trader would take his seat, leaving the victory to his adversary. The working men of England had literally to be educated in sounder principles, to be taught like children, from the alphabet of politics upwards, until they were forced to throw aside their prejudices to make room for that knowledge which was crowding itself upon them. "If you bring the truth home to a man," said Cobden, "he must embrace it." To bring the truth home to the people of England became the duty of the League. We shall show how well the work was done.



## CHAPTER V.

## THE STRUGGLE FOR FREE TRADE IN ENGLAND.

The working people of England were divided into two classes, the city operatives and the rural population. They differed from each other in dress, in manners, and in personal appearance. The city workmen was quick of movement, and of great mental activity, the farm laborer was heavy, dull and slow. Although the corn laws were made for the "protection" of agricultural industry, the tiller of the soil was overworked and underpaid. His life was passed in abject poverty. He had no more hope than the team he drove. He was still, in fact—though not in law—a serf; and he went with the land. Whoever bought that, bought him. In 1843, the traveler in the West Riding of Yorkshire, meeting a rustic with a drove of hogs in front of him, looked for the brass collar round his neck, expecting to read upon it the old familiar legend preserved by Scott,—“*Gueth, the son of Beowulf, is the born thrall of Cedric of Rotherwood.*” The brass collar was not there, but the swineherd was as much a “thrall” as was his ancestor in the days of Wilfred of Ivanhoe.

Less than sixty miles from London, and within hearing of the bells of Cambridge, the rough-shod clown thrashed his master’s grain with a flail, as his forefathers did in the days of Alfred. He knew no more than they; and his dialect was very much like theirs. Of the politics of England, he knew about as much as of the politics of Japan. Although great in numbers, the agricultural laborers contributed literally nothing to that public opinion, which is so important an element in the government of England.

It was different with the working people in the towns. They were restless, ambitious and discontented. They mingled much together, and they discussed social problems. They formed clubs, societies and trades-unions. They attended political meetings, and debating clubs, they read a great deal, and they could furnish more stump orators to the hundred men, than even we can furnish in America. There was always a speaker on hand and an audience. It was therefore in the towns that the principal work of the League was done.

At first the League met with opposition even in the towns, and its meetings were often interrupted, and sometimes broken up. The Charists insisted that a radical reform of the government itself should be attempted before economic changes. When universal suffrage and a free ballot were obtained, then would be time enough to repeal the corn laws; and they demanded that the League should unite with them. Besides, the jealousy of foreign competition was not easily removed, and there

was a prevalent suspicion that the League was to lower the wages of the workmen.

There was but one way to reach the minds of these people, and that way was taken by the League. It was hard work to teach them the abstract principles of Political Economy, or to show them the ultimate advantages of Free Trade. The surest way to reach them was by the concrete argument of a big loaf of bread for a small sum of money. A big loaf was an object lesson they could easily understand, and when thoroughly learned, it made even abstract lessons easy. It was shown to them that the laws for the "protection of native industry," actually excluded from England shiploads of cheap flour, and meal, and meat, that wanted to come in; that thereby scarcity was created by force of law, and the obvious and intended effect of the scarcity was to increase the price of bread. This argument at last took fast hold of all the people in the towns, and although they still clung to their sentimental politics, and demanded radical measures of parliamentary reform, a majority of them became disciples and adherents of the League.

The Free Traders acted wisely in the very beginning of the struggle by refusing to complicate their plans by any alliance with either of "the two great parties" inside Parliament, or with the third great party, the unrepresented Charists outside. They kept in view the one great object, the repeal of the Corn Laws, and directed all their energies to that.

Between 1839 and 1844, the League had distributed nine millions of tracts among the people, and had furnished a Free Trade library to every voter in the kingdom. This was Cobden's way of "bringing the truth home to a man." It cost a great deal of money, but the League had plenty. Cobden, Bright, and scores of orators of lesser note, were constantly "on the stump." Every part of England was canvassed, not the manufacturing towns alone, but even the rural districts. In 1842 Cobden and Bright held meetings in many parts of Scotland, and they had little trouble in convincing the people of that country that the protective system was injurious to every business and every industry there. Mr. Bright confessed that the people of Scotland were much more intelligent than the people of England, and with the exception of the landlords and some of the great monopolists, they were nearly all Free Traders.

By the Autumn of 1843 the Free Trade agitation had reached immense proportions, and the Protectionists had almost ceased to contend against it in argument. Timid people now pretended to feel alarmed at its dimensions. They believed in the principle, but thought the League was carrying things too far. It was shaking society too much. The League and its leaders were coarsely assailed by the *Times* and the *Re-*

*views*, and some of the Tory papers called upon the Government to suppress it, as a seditious and treasonable conspiracy. Its answers to all this denunciation was redoubled activity on the part of the League. Meetings were held in the agricultural districts, right among the farmers, and Free Trade resolutions carried. This was the most disheartening fact of all. The Tory papers bitterly denounced their own men, because they had not the courage to meet Cobden and Bright in argument, and when they did meet them, confessed themselves defeated by Free Trade fallacies that could easily be answered.

London was roused at last. The great halls were found utterly insufficient for the Free Trade meetings. They wouldn't hold a quarter of the multitudes that flocked to hear the Free Trade orators, so Drury Lane Theatre was engaged for the purpose. Petitions to Parliament asking for Free Trade were displayed at the street corners, and signed by tens of thousands of people. To emphasize the struggle, a vacancy in Parliament for the City of London occurred in the fall of 1843. After a severe contest Mr. Pattison, the Free Trade candidate, was elected over the Tory candidate, Mr. Baring, a nephew of Lord Ashburton, and a man of great wealth and personal popularity. This was an omen of further disaster to the Protectionists; and although the physical force of their majority in the House of Commons still remained intact, its moral vigor was visibly crumbling under the pressure of the League.

If the votes in Parliament were not a just barometer to record the pressure of the League upon the public councils, the debates, at least, furnished an accurate standard by which that pressure could be measured. In the month of February, 1844, the Queen herself went down to the House of Lords, and opened Parliament. Her speech contained this paragraph:

"I congratulate you on the improved condition of several branches of the trade and manufactures of the country. I trust that the increased demand for labor has relieved, in a corresponding degree, many classes of my faithful subjects from sufferings and privations, which, at former periods I have had occasion to deplore."

As Sir Robert Peel walked down to the House of Commons to meet the Parliament at the opening of the session of 1844, it was noticed that his eye was clear and bright, his step elastic, his bearing proud; and the haggard look which sat upon his face at the previous session was gone. His manner plainly told that he was not afraid of Bright or Cobden now. He was fortified with a weapon of defense against them, which, curiously enough, they themselves had furnished him. The country was prosperous, as he had proudly proclaimed in the speech from the throne. Less than two years had gone since he had yielded to

the League a slight experimental modification of the tariff, and the success of the experiment had been greater than even the Free Traders had dared to prophesy. The reduction of import duties had been followed by an increased revenue from imports. The modification of the corn laws, slight as it was, and a good harvest had made bread cheaper, and to the utter confounding of the protectionists, cheaper bread had been accompanied by higher wages. A small abatement of the protective system had been followed by increased manufacturing activity, capital had come forth from its hiding places, and was invested in farming, in trade, and in manufactures, labor was in demand, and the Prime Minister could say, and justly too, "If Cobden declared last year that I was individually responsible for the distress of the country, he must, this year, give me the credit for its prosperity."

When we speak here of prosperity, it must be understood that we use the term in a comparative sense only. There was a great amount of poverty yet in the country, and hunger and misery everywhere, but as compared with the previous year the improvement was very great. Strangely enough, the success of the slight advance toward Free Trade, made by Peel in the tariff of 1842, instead of being an encouragement to proceed further in the same direction, was given as a reason why he should stop. Help us to let well enough alone was now the appeal of the Minister to the House of Commons and the country. All the assaults of Cobden were parried by Peel with the Free Trade weapon he had borrowed from the League in 1842. By means of this, he said: "I have improved the condition of the country, let us be content."

The country recognized that the "better times" were due to the labors of the League, but was not generous enough to say so. The action of the high-toned so-called liberal newspapers was shuffling and insincere. One of them, of great respectability and immense circulation, speaking joyfully of the Queen's speech, and in congratulations to the country, said: "We express no opinion upon the effect of the speech upon the present Corn Law agitation—the League does not want more vigorous opponents or more vigorous support than are engaged for or against it at the present crisis." As an excuse for not supporting the League, it pretended that the League was strong enough already.

Without stopping to discuss any further who was entitled to the credit of it, one thing is certain, the improved condition of the country gave the Ministers a firmer grip of the government, and when Mr. Hume and Lord John Russell both complained that no reference to the Corn Laws was made in the Queen's speech, Sir Robert Peel, feeling the full strength of his position, gave positive notice that no alteration would be made in the Corn Laws. Old Hume, however, nothing daunted, moved

as an amendment to the address in answer to the royal speech, "that the provision laws should be considered and dealt with." He was overwhelmed by a majority of no less than 185 votes.

Early in the session, Mr. Cobden gave notice of a motion for a committee to enquire into the effects of import duties on tenant farmers, and farm laborers. This was carrying the war into Africa. The majority in Parliament had been contending that those import duties were imposed for the "protection" of those very classes whose condition Mr. Cobden proposed to enquire into. They dared not grant the motion, for they well knew that if they did, Cobden would bring a hatful of facts, to demonstrate that every year the tenant farmer was sinking deeper and deeper into debt, and that the farm laborer was shivering on the very verge of starvation. Mr. Gladstone commanded the Protectionist forces that night, and he defeated Cobden by the stubborn majority of 224 to 133.

The moral power of the League in Parliament, was shown in the June debate on the amended motion of Mr. Villiers for a total repeal of the Corn Laws, and the physical power of the administration was shown in the vote upon that motion. It was as follows:

"That it is in evidence before this House that a large proportion of her Majesty's subjects are insufficiently provided with the first necessities of life; that nevertheless, a Corn Law is in force which restricts the supply of food, and thereby lessens its abundance; that any such restriction is indefensible in principle, injurious in operation, and ought to be abolished."

To this motion Mr. Ferrand offered the following amendment:

"That it is in evidence before this House that a large proportion of her Majesty's subjects are insufficiently provided with the first necessities of life; that although a Corn Law is in force which protects the supply of food produced by British capital and native industry, and thereby increases its abundance, whilst it lessens competition in the markets of labor, nevertheless machinery has for many years lessened among the working classes, the means of purchasing the same, and that such Corn Law having for its object the protection of British capital and the encouragement of native labor ought not to be abolished."

This amendment is now looked upon in England with the same curiosity that we gaze upon the Plesiosaurus, or some other skeleton from the antediluvian world; and we exhume it just to show what fantastic doctrines British statesmen and members of Parliament believed in less than forty years ago; and the amazing fact remains, that every bit of this crazy amendment, except the childish complaint against machinery, is sound Protectionist doctrine in the United States to-day, the obvious



untruth that the exclusion of wheat, nails, or cloth from a country, increases the abundance within that country of wheat, nails, and cloth, is as vehemently asserted by the Protectionist party in America now, as it was by Mr. Ferrand in the English Parliament thirty-eight years ago. How familiar to us also is that hollow claptrap, "protection of British capital, and the encouragement of native labor."

It was significant of the power of the League, that Mr. Ferrand's amendment was treated with silent derision. There was not a man even on the Tory benches who was willing to stultify himself by the advocacy of any such nonsense. The debate was notable for several reasons. During its progress the Whigs climbed up on the fence, and they stayed there for a year, Lord John Russell declaring, as he did so, that he could not vote to remove all protection, and he was not in favor of the existing law; he wished a compromise could be arrived at. Mr. Miles, a rather talkative Tory, called upon the *Country Gentlemen* to listen to no compromise, but to maintain the law as it stood.

This debate revealed a more important fact, which was, that the politics of the country was no longer a contest for office between the Tories on one side and the Whigs on the other, but was a life and death struggle between the Protectionists majority inside Parliament, and the League outside. It was significant that the Tories, instead of directing their arguments to the question before the House, spent their time in criticising the League and denouncing its methods.

Mr. Milner Gibson defended the League. That there might be no misunderstanding of its objects he declared that it sought not only Free Trade in corn, but in everything. He quoted from Paley, that restraint of trade is an evil *per se*, and that the burden of the argument in each particular case lies on him by whom the restraint is defended. Mr. Cobden having endorsed and strengthened the broad platform just laid down by Mr. Gibson, reminded the House that it was not the League that was on trial, but the law.

Sir Robert Peel then rose to answer Cobden. He accepted the broad issue presented by Milner Gibson, and agreed that the repeal of the protective duties upon corn meant the withdrawal of protection from manufactures and from shipping, too. This, he said, would be productive of disaster to the country. Amid uproarious cheering from the "country gentlemen," he declared that it was the intention of the government to adhere to the present law. There was a fatal weakness in his argument, and he gave away his party and his case together when he admitted that the motion of Mr. Villiers was "correct in the abstract, and justified by philosophical considerations."

The Tories did not worry themselves over the moral condemnation of



“Protection” contained in these admissions; all they cared about was the promise of the Prime Minister that monopoly should not be disturbed. They were so exultant that when Mr. Bright rose to address the House, they listened to him with much impatience and finally coughed him down. Mr. Villiers, in closing the debate made a remarkable prediction. He told the “country gentlemen” who cheered the Prime Minister so vigorously that Sir Robert Peel had made the same sort of speech to them in 1839, and had afterwards thrown them overboard. The same thing would happen again. This prophecy was literally fulfilled within two years. The motion was lost by 328 against 124, a stolid majority of 204, which disheartened even Cobden, whose high spirits had never failed him since the organization of the League.

## CHAPTER VI.

When the vote was taken at the close of the great debate of 1844, the dawn of the summer day was shining through the windows of the House of Commons. It was greeted by the boisterous cheers of the Protectionist majority, stimulated not only by victory, but by wine. Those cheers smote the very heart of Cobden, and he sat there absolutely stunned by the force of the blow. Five years of incessant labor, night and day, had told heavily upon him, and mind and body needed rest together. There was another man there, however, who was smitten harder than Cobden, upon whose conscience this noisy cheering struck with a mocking sound. This was the great Minister who had led the exultant majority to victory. He, and he alone, heard in those cheers the knell of the noisy monopoly that was making them. He knew that the flushed men he commanded last night were utterly besotted and selfish, that the wants of the people were nothing to them, so that they could enjoy the unjust profits of “Protection.” He knew that if they had constituted the “landed interest” in Canaan at the time of the dearth, they would have demanded a high protective tariff against the “pauper” corn of Egypt, and the rich alluvium of the Nile. In the argument he made for them, he knew that he was wrong. The disputant who concedes that the position of his adversary is “correct in the abstract, and justified by philosophical considerations,” knows that he himself is in a false position; and if he is a conscientious man it will not take him long to reach the platform where his adversary stands.

While Cobden sat in dismay gazing at the dense majority of 204, and believing it to be solid, Peel knew that it was hollow; while Cobden was fearing that the League had failed, Peel knew that it had succeeded; that it was fast becoming irresistible, and that ere long it would conquer all opposition, that not even the British monarchy could safely stand in

its way. We all know now what nobody knew then, that the only arguments that made any impression upon Peel in that debate were not those of any member of his own party, not those of Lord John Russell or any of the Whigs, but only those of Cobden, Villiers, Bright and Gibson. In this hour of its greatest triumph, the Tory chieftain knew that the end of "Protection" was at hand.

Mr. Morley in his "Life of Cobden," describes the struggle made by the Free Traders that night as a "hollow performance." We cannot think so. We fear the despondency of Cobden has re-acted upon his biographer. The fact that the Tories wandered from the question to attack the League, is proof that they were over-matched in argument, and surely a "hollow performance" would not make the Prime Minister concede that his opponents had on their side all the philosophy of the question. Milner Gibson was very strong that night. He planted himself on the solid rock of the Creator's grand design and man's adaptation to it. He declared that to help one another, to be friends with one another, and to trade with one another, is the very law of human civilization; and he demanded that those who imposed restraints upon trade, should give good reasons why.

How did the Tories answer him? Why, they said that they had had Protection so long that they could not do without it now; thus coolly violating a maxim of the law, that no man shall take advantage of his own wrong; in other words, they contended that a wrong that had existed for a long time, became at last a right.

How did Peel answer him? By advancing the American idea that "Protection" is a system in which all parties are interested; that it had become woven into the political organization of the country, and that it gave to all industries an equal and mutual assistance; that the agriculturists were interested in "Protection" to manufactures, that manufacturers were interested in "Protection" to agriculture, and both of them were interested in "Protection" to shipping and commerce; that all must stand or fall together, and that although the motion was only aimed at corn, yet if protection was withdrawn from that, it must be withdrawn from everything else, which would be disastrous to the country. But Mr. Cobden showed in that debate that there cannot be any such thing as universal protection, because if every interest in a community is protected equally then nobody is protected at all. Protection being a tax for the benefit of certain trades or occupation, somebody has to pay it. To form ourselves into a circle and each man take a tax from the pocket of his neighbor on the right, and drop it into the pocket of his neighbor on the left, does no good, because when the starting place is reached, nobody has made anything at all.

Shortly after this debate Parliament adjourned and did not meet again until February, 1845. The temperament of Cobden was not of a character to remain despondent long, and besides, there was no occasion for discouragement. The confession of the Prime Minister that Free Trade principles were right in the abstract, had a great effect outside the walls of Parliament. Most men thought if that were so they might possibly be right in the concrete also. During the recess there were great accessions to the League. To some people who looked only on the surface of affairs, it seemed as if there was a lull in the Corn Law agitation, and that the better times had deprived the League of its strength. But the League might well claim, and did claim, that the improved condition of the country was due to the modification of the protective system in the tariff of 1842, and that if the country should discard "Protection" altogether, the good times would be better still.

Lord Beaconsfield in his "Life of Bentinck," expresses the opinion that the improved condition of the country in 1845 had rendered the League powerless to disturb the administration, and that Sir Robert Peel might have defied it, if the bad harvest had not come, and that his Government could have stood against even "the persuasive ingenuity of Cobden." But this is a superficial view of the matter, and is the opinion of the most spiteful Protectionist then in Parliament, every one of whose predictions was falsified by the event. The agitation was not so boisterous perhaps upon the surface, but it was deeper down. The crowded meetings at Covent Garden Theatre showed that the League was as formidable as ever, and a Ladies' Bazaar, held there in the spring of 1845 netted over one hundred thousand dollars to the funds of the League. But the most convincing proof of all was furnished by Sir Robert Peel himself, as soon as parliament convened.

When the Queen opened Parliament in February, 1845, she said: "Increased activity pervades almost every branch of manufacture. Trade and commerce have been extended at home and abroad. Scarcely had the address been moved and seconded, when up rose the Duke of Richmond, who began to whine like a mendicant about the distress of the agricultural classes. These were the very classes that had been "protected" by the onerous taxation of other classes for many years, and now they came to Parliament begging for relief. This Duke who was passing the hat round for them was the owner of tens of thousands of acres of the finest land in England and Scotland. He had a palace in the loveliest and most fertile part of England, and it took ten miles of wall to enclose his pleasure ground, the park around his mansion. To keep up the style and extravagance of a prince, he impoverished hundreds of his tenants, and then asked Parliament to relieve them, at some other people's cost.

In the debate on the address in the House of Commons, some of the "landed gentry," there talked as the Duke of Richmond had talked in the House of Lords, which drew from Lord John Russell the significant remark that "protection" was the bane of agriculture rather than its support." This caused Mr. Miles to ask him why, if he thought so, he had proposed a fixed duty on corn. "Had he found it convenient to alter his views, and ally himself with the League?" This was a fair hit, for his Lordship was not yet ready to join the League.

It is not certain that Lord John Russell was contemplating any Free Trade movement, but it is nearly certain that Peel suspected him and determined to anticipate him, for as soon as Parliament assembled he announced, contrary to all precedent, that he would not wait till April or May to make his financial statement, but would present it to the House the next week. This of course compelled Lord John Russell to postpone his contemplated movement, whatever it might be.

The Tories mustered strong on Friday night to encourage their great leader, as he unfolded to the country his financial plans. To their amazement and dismay he opened a Free Trade budget. To be sure he had not touched the Corn Laws, but it was feared that he had passed sentence upon them, and he had only reprieved them for a time. He proposed to strike the protective duty from no less than four hundred and thirty articles then on the Tariff list, and this he had the coolness to tell his Protectionist followers, "must be a great advantage to commerce." The suicidal duties on raw materials went off with one stroke of the pen; a fine example of financial wisdom, well worthy the study of American statesmen.

This was not all. Every rag of the protective export duties was discarded, even the venerable export duty on coal, which had stood firm for centuries, and which even John Stuart Mill thought might wisely be retained. In the ignorant ages of protective philosophy, it was considered dangerous for British manufacturers to sell coal to the Germans or the French, lest they should use it in manufacturing articles that might compete in foreign markets with those of Great Britain. But the tax was abolished at last, and by a Protectionist ministry. There was great cheering when Sir Robert Peel sat down, but it came not from his own party, but from the Free Trade crowd who occupied the benches opposite. The "country gentlemen," the "squires," who cheered themselves into apoplexy last June, now sat silent and enraged; and there were signs of mutiny.

It broke out in the early days of March. Mr. Miles in a debate on the agricultural distress, distinctly told his chief that if the Tories had known what was coming they would have beaten him in 1842, and Mr.

Disraeli denounced the administration as an "organized hypocrisy." In this debate Sir Robert Peel made a very careful speech. He thought extreme protection wrong and defended moderate protection as "necessary, not on principles of commercial policy, but as essential to a state of things where great interests had grown up, and whose injury would be that of the community at large."

The student of American politics may wisely study this apology of Sir Robert Peel. He will hear it often in the "impending conflict" in America, between Protection and Free Trade. Sir Robert Peel himself stigmatized his own reasoning as unsound "on principles of commercial policy," but "great interests had grown up" under the stimulus of Protection, and if the artificial prop which supported those great interests should be removed, they would fall to the ground; and the people who were living on them would receive injury. That the withdrawal of "Protection" would be an injury to the protected classes was true, but that it would be an injury to the community at large was false. The community at large being taxed for the benefit of a class, he pretended that a removal of the tax would be an injury, not only to those who received it, but to those who paid it. This absurdity is flippantly maintained by the American Protectionists even now.

This position of Sir Robert Peel is a lesson and a warning to us. It shows that no matter under what circumstances of pretended urgency, "Protection" may be conceded, the "protected" class is never ready to surrender it. The rack-renting Morrill tariff of 1861, which Mr. Morrill himself declared at that time could only be defended as a "War measure" by the urgency of our situation, is now, sixteen years after the war, impudent and rapacious. Mr. Morrill will not permit a hair of its head to be injured. He is willing to take it out of politics, and refer it to a "commission" of its friends. That "commission" will tell the country in the language of Peel, that its preservation has become "essential to a state of things where great interests have grown up, whose injury would be that of the community at large."

Late in May, Lord John Russell's plan was given to the country. It consisted of nine resolutions which the Whig leader presented to Parliament, in a speech which was easily and successfully answered by Peel. These resolutions were intended to constitute a new platform for the Whigs. Had they been proclaimed before the opening of Parliament they would have been regarded as so liberal and far advanced that they might have embarrassed both the Tories and the League; but coming after Peel's budget they were of no more interest than nine old newspapers. Like some other political parties that might be mentioned, the Whigs came limping along behind their enemies. Of the nine resolutions, this history is only concerned with two.



The second resolution was: "That those laws which impose duties usually called protective, tend to impair the efficiency of labor, to restrict the free interchange of commodities, and so impose on the people unnecessary taxation."

It took the League six long years to pound those principles into Lord John Russell. He had adopted them at last, and it must be acknowledged that in making his confession to the House of Commons, he managed to condense a vast amount of economic truth into a very few sentences. The wonderful fact remains that he was not yet ready to apply those principles to corn.

The third resolution was: "That the present Corn Law tends to check improvements in agriculture, produces uncertainty in all farming speculations, and holds out to the owners and occupiers of land prospects of special advantage, which it fails to secure."

And yet he was not ready to vote for a repeal of that law. He merely wanted to change the "sliding scale" for a fixed duty. He confessed however, that after all the discussion which had taken place, "he could not fairly and reasonably propose the eight shillings fixed duty of 1841." He thought that a duty of four, five or six shillings would be about right. The League had made him a Free Trader as to everything but corn, and as to that it had crowded him back from eight shillings a quarter to six, or five, or even four. Lord John Russell had the Whigs and Free Traders with him on the division, but was easily beaten by a majority of seventy-eight.

In June again came on the annual motion of Mr. Villiers for a total repeal of the Corn Laws. The debate showed nothing remarkable except the towering air of superiority with which Sir Robert Peel lectured the pack behind him. With lordly patronage he told them that although he was about to lead them to victory once more, their arguments were unsound. He formally repudiated and laid aside the mistake of the Protectionists, that dear commodities make high wages, and although some of his own followers had proclaimed the doctrine in that very debate, he told them it was not true. The Protectionists bore this lecture with such patience as they could, but when their leader told them that he opposed the motion, not because it wasn't right, but because he desired to make a "gradual approach to sound principles," meaning the principles of Free Trade, they could scarce conceal their anger. To be told, not only that their arguments were bad, but that their principles were not "sound," was more than they could bear; however the division was taken mechanically, and the Speaker announced that the noes had it by 254 to 122. This was the last victory for the Protectionists

in England. Parliament adjourned in August. When it met again in January, the Tory party had been disintegrated and broken to pieces by the League; the Protectionists were disorganized and routed so completely that they were never afterwards known as a party in the politics of Great Britain.

## CHAPTER VII.

And now the time was close at hand when that boasted Protective system which was to make Britain "independent of foreign countries" for its food supply was to be subjected to a test it could not stand. In the summer of 1845 Cobden had ridiculed that precarious commercial system which was at the mercy of a shower of rain. Three weeks rainy weather, he said, when the wheat is ripening, will prove the danger of leaving the industrial scheme of such a country as England to stand or fall on the cast of a die. He had scarcely ceased to speak when the rainy weather came, and it lasted through the harvest time. The crop was short and its quality was poor. In September a horrid whisper crept through England. It was that the potato crop of Ireland was smitten with a strange disease. It soon became certain that scarcely a field of potatoes in Ireland had escaped the blight.

In October the reports grew worse, and men all over England were cursing between their teeth that governmental system which had made the Irish people dependent on a wretched root for food. So far from being independent, the people of the British Islands saw themselves in the autumn of 1845 almost at the mercy of other nations for their coming winter's bread.

The League had now become almost irresistible. A large portion of the press, which had so long held aloof from it, gave in their adhesion not only to its doctrines, but to its plans. It held great meetings and gained many converts; it caused petitions to be circulated throughout the country, demanding the immediate repeal of the Corn Laws. These were signed by thousands. Mr. O'Connell, who had long been a member of the League, sent fearful accounts from Ireland, and demanded a cessation of party conflict in the presence of the calamity that was impending over the country. He called upon the government to open the ports to the admission of foreign grain. Sir Robert Peel felt the fearful weight of his responsibility, and there were frequent meetings of the Cabinet, but the people knew nothing of its discussions, except that they were not harmonious.

The discord in the Cabinet looked like an opportunity for the Whigs, and they thought to make party capital out of it. Lord John Russell was in Edinburgh quietly watching the progress of events. He saw

that there was a division in the Cabinet. How wide it was he did not know, but he thought that probably it was wide enough to let him pass through it and return once more to power. All through November the political gloom grew deeper, and at last he thought that his time had come.

He was member for the City of London, and on the 22d of November he wrote from Edinburgh a letter to his constituents on the condition of the country. It was written in the narrow spirit or party, but the people did not notice that; all they noticed was the more important fact that he had gone bodily over to the League, and declared himself in favor of Free Trade. He confessed that he had been converted from the errors of a life-time. "I used to be of the opinion," he said "that corn was an exception to the general rules of political economy." Observation and experience had at last convinced him of the expensive folly of the whole protective system. He said, "Let us, then, unite to put an end to a system which has been proved to be the blight of commerce, the bane of agriculture, the source of bitter divisions among classes, the cause of penury, fever, mortality and crime among the people."

This letter meant that the Whigs had got off the fence; and presently they were seen tumbling over one another in their haste to join the League. It precipitated the crisis, and broke up the Ministry. As soon as it appeared Sir Robert Peel called the Cabinet together. He told his Ministers that he could not any longer assume the responsibility of continuing the Corn Laws, he proposed to open the ports by an order in council, and declared himself in favor of Free Trade. Some of the younger Tories were willing to go with Peel, but the Duke of Wellington, Lord Stanley and some others could not consent to the overthrow of the Corn Laws, which in some shape or other had taxed the people of England for more than four hundred years. The clamor of the League could be heard in the Council Chamber, and rather than endure it any longer the whole Ministry resigned. On Monday, the 8th of December, the Council was held, on Tuesday it was whispered at the clubs that the game was up; and on Wednesday the resignations were accepted by the Queen.

Lord John Russell was sent for to form an administration. He accepted the task, and there was a great deal of "mounting in hot haste," and "hurrying to and fro," and sending for this man and for that man. After a couple of weeks of fussy tinkering with the "crisis," he went down and told the Queen that he had failed in his attempt to form a Government; he confessed in the language of "Punch" which was

making fun of him at the time, that he wasn't "big enough for the place."

When Lord John Russell was making up the "slate," he offered the greatest man in England, the author of the commercial revolution, a subordinate position as Vice-President of the Board of Trade, under a titled mediocrity, the Earl of Clarendon, who was to be President of the Board. This was a good deal like offering Oliver Cromwell a Corporalship under the Earl of Essex. So difficult was it for the Whig aristocracy to understand that the Democracy of England had at last become a power in the State. Of course Cobden declined the offer.

It was not to be regretted that Lord John Russell failed to form a Government. Had he succeeded, he would have subordinated the mighty question of the hour to the exigencies of party. There was but one man who was equal to the occasion, who had the ability, the scientific knowledge, the character, and the Parliamentary following, to carry England safely through. That man was Peel. Lord John Russell advised the Queen to send for him, and place the Government in his hands once more. Sir Robert resumed his office and proceeded to reconstruct his Cabinet. Most of the old members agreed to serve under him again. Among the new members was Gladstone, who had been out of office for some time. Even the Duke of Wellington, whose Tory prejudices were so bitter and so strong, agreed to take office under Peel once more, and promised to stand by him till the fight was ended. It is conclusive proof of the confidence of the people in Peel's capacity, that as soon as it was known that he had consented to resume his office, the funds rose.

All this time the League was pressing its advantage; it faltered not. Immense meetings were held in London, Manchester, and other places. At a great meeting in Dublin, Mr. O'Connell proclaimed "every man an enemy who did not support Bright and Cobden." On the 15th of December a vast Free Trade meeting was held at Guild Hall, the City Hall of London, which was presided over by the Lord Mayor himself, in his robes of office. The mighty giants, Gog and Magog, who inhabited Guild Hall, and who had guarded London ever since the time of the Saxon Kings, were nearly shaken from their pedestals by the cheers that went up when Cobden rose to speak. He was in great spirits that day, for he knew that the end was near.

Two days afterwards there was a great meeting at Covent Garden Theatre. Thirty thousand tickets of admission were applied for. But London was excelled by Manchester. At one meeting there, it was resolved to raise two hundred and fifty thousand pounds for the League.

Twenty-three men subscribed a thousand pounds each, as fast as the secretary could write their names. Nothing could stand against such earnest public opinion as this.

The Queen opened Parliament on the 20th of January, 1846. The speech from the throne foreshadowed what was coming. The mover and the seconder in answer to the royal speech were listened to with the usual courtesy, and then "Sir Devon the Bull" proceeded to butt the cars off the track. The Duke of Richmond denounced the anticipated policy of the Government, and called upon their lordships not to abandon the protective system. He told them not to allow themselves to be intimidated by the Anti-Corn Law League.

The Duke of Richmond, like many others of the English nobility, had plenty of courage, but little wisdom. He had proved his courage at Waterloo, and carried a French bullet in his lungs which he got in that battle, and he was perfectly willing to fight the Free Trade locomotive. Wellington, his old commander, answered him. He told him it was no use trying to stop the train; that the Corn Laws were sentenced, and that the sentence would be executed in a few days. Still the Duke fought desperately, until old Wellington thought like Richard, that there must be at least "six Richmonds in the field."

Sir Robert Peel made a short explanation that same night in the House of Commons. In the course of it he said that his opinions on the Protective Tariff had undergone a change. He was yielding to the force of argument and more enlarged experience. He had closely watched the operation of Protective duties during the past four or five years, and was now convinced that the arguments in favor of their maintenance were no longer tenable. He was convinced that low wages were not the result of low prices for food. "Since the year 1842," he said "when the first invasion was made on the principle of Protection, the exports had risen from forty-two millions of pounds to forty-seven millions." The results of the revenue presented a similar picture. It was then agreed that on the next Tuesday the Minister should present his new commercial plans. Peel's was a Free Trade speech, and, as Cobden wrote the next day to a friend: "it would have done for Covent Garden Theatre," the place where the League meetings were held. It was not the speech of a Minister who was yielding to pressure, but of a man who had become convinced. As he said a few nights afterward, when taunted by the Tories with having deserted them, "it was the declaration of a man who had become converted to the belief that the Protective system was not only impolitic, but unjust."



## CONCLUSION.

Tuesday, January 27th, 1846, was an exciting day in London. Although it was known that on that evening the Prime Minister intended to propose in Parliament a radical change in the commercial policy of England, yet it was not known in detail what that change would be. Although Parliament did not meet until four or five o'clock, crowds of people began to assemble in the neighborhood of the House of Commons as early as one o'clock, and before four o'clock the house itself was crowded in every part. Westminster Hall had not seen so great a multitude since the trial of Warren Hastings, while the open street was densely crowded from Westminster Abbey to Whitehall. The peers' gallery was crowded full of Dukes, and Earls, and Barons, anxious to learn the fate of those monopolies which their order had enjoyed for centuries. The Duke of Cambridge, the Queen's uncle, was there, and Prince Albert was accommodated with a seat inside the bar. After he had gone his presence there was criticised. There were some super-sensitive members who resented the presence of the Queen's husband within the House of Commons, as an attempt of the Crown to influence the free debates of Parliament. Some sort of excuse was given by the court, and the Prince never entered the House again.

Those members who were known to be in favor of Free Trade, were loudly cheered as they were severally recognized, while the Protectionists were received in silence. The Duke of Wellington received a great ovation. It was known that he had promised Peel to assist him in carrying Free Trade. Although he had opposed every popular movement of his time, he was always forgiven, because of Waterloo. Near five o'clock, a roar of cheering, rolling along the street, announced the coming of Sir Robert Peel. As he alighted from his carriage he raised his hat in acknowledgement of the hearty greetings of his countrymen, and passed into the House. He carried a small box in his left hand. It contained the death warrant of the protective system. In that little box were carefully arranged the details of the new commercial policy, the enlightened system of Free Trade.

In a few minutes Sir Robert Peel began his speech. For three hours the crowd listened to the minister, as one after another, each protected interest went down to its doom. He gave due notice that while he called upon the agriculturists to resign the protection they had long enjoyed, he should require the manufacturers to resign theirs also.

With unrelenting hand he struck protection from the linen, the woolen, and the cotton manufacturers, from the iron-workers and the silk weavers, from the soap makers and the brass-founders, from the

shoe-makers and the tanners, from ribbon-makers and from hatters, from tin-workers and from button-makers, from tailors and from carriage makers, from West India sugar planters, and from everybody.

With great candor Sir Robert Peel described the process of his conversion from the errors of Protection to the truths of Free Trade. He quoted some good doctrine from the American Secretary of the Treasury who had lately said: "By countervailing restrictions we injure our own fellow-citizens much more than the foreign nation at whom we purpose to aim their force, and in the conflict of opposing tariffs we sacrifice our own commerce, agriculture, and navigation. Let our commerce be as free as our political institutions. Let us with revenue duties only, open our ports to all the world."

Thus among the missionaries who had helped to convert Sir Robert Peel was the American Secretary of the Treasury. Let us hope that the time is not far off when we shall see another Secretary of the Treasury equally wise.

Time to consider such important changes was demanded by the Tories, and two weeks was granted. There were some who demanded that the sense of the country should be taken first, that Parliament should be dissolved, and a new election had. Some were in favor of referring the whole matter to a "commission," and thus obtain a reprieve. But it was no use, and on Monday, the 9th of February, the great debate began, the most important that had taken place since 1688. It lasted three weeks, and more than a hundred speeches were made. It was thought the debate would end on Friday night, the 27th of February. Great crowds of people waited in Parliament street all night long, anxious to hear the result. The debate ended at three o'clock on Saturday morning, February 28th, 1846. When the division was had, there appeared to be—For the Government proposals, 337; against them, 240. The revolution was accomplished. The cheers of the Free Traders inside and outside the House waked up London. The Protectionist Parliament of 1841 had, in the beginning of 1846, established Free Trade as the commercial policy of England by a majority of ninety-seven votes. The great struggle was ended, and the industry of Britain was free. In the year 1436 the first law was passed restricting the importation of foreign grain. It had been altered for better and for worse many times since then, and now, at the venerable age of four hundred and ten years, it was slain on the spot where it was born. As the League had proclaimed from the very beginning, it carried down with it the whole system of Protection.

The bill was not yet law; it had to go through the usual stages, and

in fact it was not until May that it passed the third reading, and went up to the House of Lords; but all this was mere formality, after the vote of February 28th,—the mere ceremonial of nailing on the coffin lid, and preparing the deceased for burial. When the bill went up to the Lords, the Tory peers made a great pretense of throwing it out, but they were at last afraid to do so. They had only one man among them of really great ability. This was Lord Stanley, who had lately resigned his place in the Cabinet, rather than consent to the repeal of the Corn Laws. The hopes of monopoly therefore centered on him. Every Protectionist in England was yelping behind him, "On, Stanley, on!"

He made a great speech, which for a moment infused a little courage into his party. He opposed Free Trade with the same vehemence that his father and his grandfather had opposed railroads, and for the same antiquated reasons. The old man used to keep a lot of people employed, whose duty it was to shoot any railroad surveyor who came upon his lands. Lord Stanley paraded over and over again the ancient heresies of the Protective system, as if the steam engine and the printing press had not yet come. Shut out from the light of the 19th century in the gloomy grandeur of the House of Lords, his speech might have been the speech of his ancestor, fresh from the fight at Bosworth Field.

The last squeak of "Protection" was uttered by the Duke of Richmond, who presented a petition from the ribbon-makers, praying that their contemptible monopoly might be spared from the general wreck. Once more, Richmond and Buckingham called upon their lordships not to be afraid of the League, but the fact was, they were afraid of it. They feared that if they threw out the bill, and thereby compelled a dissolution of Parliament, the excitement of the people would add such power to the League, that in its rage its might sweep away not only the Corn Laws but the House of Lords itself. They therefore allowed the bill to pass, and they were so disheartened, that on the 25th of June the bill went through on its third reading, without even a division.

That same night, the Government of Sir Robert Peel was overthrown. On the coercion bill for Ireland, the irreconcilable Tory faction, led on by Lord George Bentinck, took revenge upon the Minister for his Free Trade policy by voting with the opposition, and on a division the administration was defeated by 292 to 219. Sir Robert Peel immediately resigned. On Monday night he announced his resignation in a speech of much good temper, pathos and dignity. In the very hour of his fall his political sky was at its brightest. On that very day came a dispatch from America, announcing that the United States Government had settled the Oregon question on the terms proposed by him,

and thus had dissipated the war cloud which for some time had darkened the relations between the two countries.

Of course much of his speech was a review of his Free Trade policy, and to the leader of the Free Trade movement he paid this magnanimous tribute. He said: "The name which ought to be associated with the success of the Free Trade measures is not the name of the noble Lord, the member for London, nor is it my name. It is the name of a man who, acting, as I believe, from disinterested motives, has, with untiring energy, by appeals to reason enforced their necessity with an eloquence the more to be admired because it was unaffected and unadorned;—the name which ought to be associated with the success of these measures is the name of Richard Cobden." This lifted the Free Traders right out of their seats, and the cheering was loud and long. A great many Tories joined in it, for everybody liked Cobden. At last, in the midst of deep silence, he said:

"Sir, I shall leave office, I fear, with a name severely censured by many honorable gentlemen, who, on public principle, deeply regret the severance of party ties; I shall surrender power severely censured, I fear again by many honorable gentlemen, who, from no interested motive, have adhered to the principle of Protection as important to the welfare and interests of the country; I shall leave a name execrated by every monopolist, who, from less honorable motives, maintains Protection for his own individual benefit; but it may be that I shall leave a name sometimes remembered with expressions of good will in those places which are the abode of men, whose lot it is to labor, and to earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brow—a name remembered with expressions of good will, when they shall recreate their exhausted strength with abundant and untaxed food, the sweeter because it is no longer leavened with a sense of injustice."

As he took his seat, nearly the whole house rose and cheered him vociferously for several minutes; only the sulky Protectionist faction remained silent. Since the time of Woolsey no Prime Minister of England had fallen with greater dignity.

When the cheering had subsided, he again rose and moved that the House adjourn till Friday, to give Lord John Russell time to form the new administration. Then taking the arm of a friend, he left the House. In order to avoid the vast crowds in the streets, he left by the side door that led into Westminster Hall, and tried to escape by that way, but the crowd heard of it and headed him off. Hundreds of men formed a circle around him, and with rude but respectful courtesy, they escorted him to his home. Never, in the history of England, was the fall of a Minister so like a triumph.

Our history ends here, but a word of postscript may not be out of place. As soon as England was freed from the incumbrances of what is improperly called "Protection," she bounded forward to a prosperity greater than she had ever known before. We have avoided statistics as much as possible, for they are dry reading, and we offer only the following statistical argument in proof of what we say: In 1846, the year of the Free Trade measures, the foreign commerce of the United Kingdom, exports and imports, amounted to 670 millions of dollars; in 1876 it was 3,275 millions. Within these figures may be included all other statistics of every kind.

The Free Trade policy has given to the people of England more to eat, more to wear, and better houses to live in; it has given them higher wages with less hours of labor; It has given them more holidays, more books, and more enjoyments; their moral advancement has kept pace with their material prosperity. The man who sees the people of England now, and remembers the English of 1846 can scarcely recognize the people, so great has been the improvement in one generation.

On the impartial Protectionist seeking to know the truth, these facts and figures may have some weight; on the selfish Protectionist, interested in the preservation of monopoly, they will make no impression. On him reason, argument, facts, and figures are all lost. To him the instructive numbers we have just given are unsubstantial and unreal, a vagary of Free Trade, a theory and a delusion. To him a barn, or a ship, or a grain elevator is nothing but a cloud, and "very like a whale;" to him the demonstrations of geometry are only the fanatical theories of Euclid. He is outside the courts of reason.

We treat with respect every Protectionist argument except one—that which consists in a sneer at the Free Trade policy of Great Britain, a policy which has been so largely beneficial, not only to the people of England, but to the people of America. It is difficult to keep down an expression of contempt when we hear men who inhabit the fertile plain between the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, speak with derision of a policy which offers them a free and open market for everything they raise, and for everything they are able to manufacture, a policy which has not only multiplied the comforts of life to all the people of Great Britain, but which has given an added value to every acre of land in Iowa.









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